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ROSALBA; OR, FAITHFUL TO TWO LOVES.

An Episode of the Rebellion of 1837-38.

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[Written for the Canadian Illustrated News.]

CHAPTER VI.—Continued.

We need not intrude on the privacy of the lovers. They approached closer to each other, spoke in whispers, but all the while their faces were radiant with that unmistakable light which the bliss and rapture of requited love always impart. The result of the interview may be gathered from this little circumstance. Edgar took the emerald ring, set it on the tip of Rosalba's forefinger, held it up and exclaimed:

"Is my hope fulfilled at last?"

Just then the heavy tread of the farmer was heard in the hall behind them.

"My father!" exclaimed Rosalba nervously.

"Let us go in to see him," said Edgar.

Samuel Varny looked grave and sad, as he shook hands with the youth. His manner completely chilled the young couple. Edgar had to summon all his courage to introduce the subject nearest to his heart. Scarcely had he uttered a sentence, when the old man shook his head ominously, and stopped him short.

"Edgar Martin," said the farmer in a husky voice, his iron frame shaking with emotion, "you love my daughter, and my daughter loves you. So far it is well. But when there is question of marriage, we must pause. I had looked forward to this day with as much pleasure as yourselves, but now —"

There was a thrilling silence in the room.

Varny drew out a newspaper from his breast-pocket, unfolded it and pointing to a particular passage, handed it to Edgar.

"You were at that Lacadie meeting, Edgar?"

"Yes, Sir, I was," replied the young patriot, not yet awakened to the reality of the situation. "And you voted for that resolution against bureaucrats?"

"Yes, Sir. Why not?"

"Well, Sir, I am one of those hated bureaucrats!" said Varny, with a bitter smile.

"Impossible!" exclaimed Edgar in amazement.

"I never thought fit to acknowledge it before, but I do so now."

"Mr Varny," replied the youth with deep feeling, "I had often heard this and other accusations against you, but I never believed them. I can hardly believe your own words now."

"You must believe them, Edgar."

The young man struck his forehead in anguish and bewilderment, while Varny drew his sobbing daughter to his knee.

"This scene is too painful, Edgar," said the old man, "let us cut it short. You have a right to your opinions. I do not blame you. But both of us must be prudent. I am responsible for the happiness of my daughter. Let us defer this whole matter. At the rate you are pushing things, a crisis must soon come. I wish you well out of it. If you meet with adversity in the day of conflict come to me and I will give you my roof to shelter you, and my daughter for your wife. If you succeed, and drive the accursed bureaucrats before your face, then it will be for Rosalba herself to decide how she will act towards you. Till then, let us await the awards of Providence."

During the whole discourse, Edgar remained standing like a statue before Mr. Varny. The blood was gone from his face, and his eyes flashed with a wild light. He had evidently formed a desperate resolution, and was making efforts to express it.

"I never dreamed it would come to this, Sir," said he. "What if I gave up the whole business, and demanded immediate possession of your daughter's hand as the price of the sacrifice?"

"You would have it, Edgar," exclaimed the old man exultantly.

During the whole of this painful interview Rosalba had not uttered a word. It was now her turn to speak. Springing from her father's knee she extended her arm as if to interpose between Varny and Edgar.

"No!" said she. "This cannot be. You have your principles, Edgar; follow them. Your country before everything else. I will wait for you till better times come. Patience and anxious expectation are the woman's lot."

"She is right," murmured the old man, bending down his head.

Edgar said nothing, but he looked up at the flushed face of the girl with triumphant pride.

From this point the interview lowered into the usual common-places of regret and sorrow. The main question having been summarily settled, there was nothing left but to repeat the sincere protestations of fidelity, and bid each other an anxious farewell.

Half an hour after Edgar Martin had departed from the mansion. Life now opened

before him under new aspects. As he darted the rows into his horse's flanks and flew across the country, the wildest projects flitted through his brain. He was resolved to plunge headlong into the revolution, and never turn back till it was accomplished. He had Rosalba's permission to do so. Nay, it was her command. At the half-way house he stopped to rest. His mind grew calmer, and he wrote this note in pencil:

"DEAREST ROSE—That is not lost which is deferred. Our love will be all the stronger for the fearful trial it has encountered. Its end and duration will be sweeter for the ordeal it passed through at the very threshold. Courage and patience! Whatever may betide, I will always be

Yours lovingly and devotedly,
E. M."

Our whole life is an illusion, and hope is the sweetest of them all. Without the hope expressed in this note, Edgar could never have done what he did, or suffered all that was in store for him.

CHAPTER VII.

ST. DENIS.

SEPTEMBER came, and with it the unmistakable signs of inevitable conflict. The farmers had gathered in their harvests, and having partially provided their families with supplies for the winter, were free to undertake a long winter campaign.

There had been hesitation in the insurrectionary camp, but it was over now. Debartzch, at whose house in St. Charles a plan of provisional government had been adopted, suddenly recoiled from the danger, abandoned the party, and took refuge with his wife's family at St. Ours. Papineau and O'Callaghan strenuously opposed any military demonstration, on the ground that the country was not prepared. But they were over-ruled. Ardent, enthusiastic spirits like Nelson, Brown, and others, swayed the masses, and their rallying cry was, "To Arms!"

It has often been asked why St. Denis and the neighbouring village of St. Charles were made the rendezvous and headquarters of the rebellion on the south of the St. Lawrence. Strategically, the position was unfavourable, being easily attacked from the front by the garrisons of Sorel and Chambly, and offering no chances for retreat from the rear through the broad belt of the Eastern Townships, which lay between them and the United States. The answer to the question is simple. These points were chosen without any deliberation, merely because the former was the residence of Nelson, the soul of the movement.

Wolfred Nelson was a splendid man, and around him clustered his partisans with that blind confidence which great talents and a high character invariably inspire.

The authorities were naturally loath to take up the gauntlet which was thrown down before them. In the first place, there really were very few troops in the country—too few, if a general uprising was attempted. Then, a needless show of vigour might increase exasperation instead of inspiring terror. For a long time, therefore, the Government was quiet and prudently expectant. But towards the end of October it suddenly resolved to act. The official plan of campaign—as excellent. The insurgents were to be attacked simultaneously from opposite quarters, completely enveloped and forced to surrender *en bloc*.

Gore was to march from Sorel; Wetherall from Chambly. The insurgents, hearing of the project, resolved to thwart it by a double front. Nelson was to hold St. Denis against Gore, and Brown to meet Wetherall at St. Charles.

On the morning of the 22nd of November, Nelson suddenly summoned Edgar Martin before him. The young man was one of his favourite officers.

"Captain," said he, "a scout has just informed me that the enemy were to break camp at Sorel, in the course of this night. I want you to go forward, with some trusty companion, to reconnoitre. The roads are very bad; they will have to make easy marches, so I shall hardly expect you to report before sunset."

Five minutes after, Martin, with a guide who was well acquainted with the country, set off on his expedition. They made direct for St. Ours, where they learned that Gore was indeed on the march, but had chosen his route along the interior ranges. Edgar tried to arouse the people of that village, who had promised their aid in case of emergency, but he found them reluctant. Issuing thence into the country, he saw many signs of the enemy's approach. Women and children were escaping across the fields; men were hurrying their teams along the road in mental dread of having them impressed. Once or twice, in open spaces, he had seen from afar the bright uniforms of the advance guard. There was enough to base a report upon, and he returned to St. Denis.

The village was in an uproar. Many families fled during the night; those that remained took measures to place themselves under shelter, for Nelson had decided to make a stand on the outskirts of the village itself, not daring to trust his small band otherwise than under

cover. He had only about 800 men, only 120 of whom were provided with muskets, the rest being armed with pikes, pitchforks, and clubs.

At length the morning of the 23rd dawned, and the British column appeared in sight. Nelson made his dispositions for battle. He threw a picked force into a large stone-house, belonging to Madame St. Germain, which stood out a little from the centre of the village, on the water's edge. Those who had fire-arms were stationed in the upper story, while those who had no muskets kept guard below. This was a great mistake, for if Gore had been able to surround the house, every man in it would have perished. As it was, the first solid shot directed against it scattered the masonry in every direction and killed five men. The rest hastily retreated. The troops advanced steadily, firing from behind the houses, but the insurgents rallied after their first discomfiture and presented an unbroken front. Gore was irritated. He ordered forward his single field-piece, but owing to some mismanagement, it did scant execution. He likewise directed Captain Markham to carry a distillery that was annoying his flank, but Markham was wounded in the charge, and his men badly repulsed. Martin distinguished himself in this encounter, for it was he who commanded the fifteen or twenty Canadians who held the distillery. Though wounded in the shoulder by a portion of a wall of the stone-house which fell upon him, he moved about incessantly wherever his services were needed. It was he who picked up poor Ovide Perrault when he was shot down in the streets. Lusignan was killed at his side.

During this part of the engagement, the women and children had taken refuge in the large central residence of the parish priest. Some were in the cellar; others in dark rooms. Messrs. Demers and Lecour moved among them with words of cheer, whenever they were not engaged in attending the wounded that were brought to them from the field of action. Children, unconscious of danger, though the balls fell thick on the tin roofs of the Church and presbytery, climbed up into the garrets to see the battle. One little girl, five years of age, knelt on the window-sill and prayed that the Lord would not allow the soldiers to kill her, because she had not lived long enough.

"Life is sweet!" said the little creature.

In the early part of the afternoon, reinforcements came to Nelson from the surrounding country, and he immediately resolved on assuming the offensive. Slowly but surely the troops were dislodged from behind fences and houses, and a body of them entrenched in a barn were driven off with loss.

The contest raged with great severity for two hours, after which Gore massed his men on the high road and ordered a retreat, leaving his ammunition and many of his wounded behind him. He was anxious to carry off his cannon, so as to abandon no material trophy with the victors, but the roads were heavy, and a couple of artillery horses having been shot down, he was compelled to relinquish that too. Nelson was too prudent to pursue any distance.

Captain Martin was one of those deputed to drag the captured smooth-bore into the village, where it remained only a few days, when it was retaken by the victorious troops.

An event of some importance to the development of our story should not be omitted here. On the day following the battle of St. Denis, and preceding that of the fight at St. Charles, intelligence was received at Nelson's camp that several bureaucrats had been arrested and were then held in custody at St. Marc. One of these was Samuel Varny. For several weeks previous he had been the object of many petty persecutions. His sheep had been killed by dogs purposely set on them. Two of his horses had been ham-strung, and several of his cows had mysteriously strayed away. His barn had twice been set on fire, and he himself had been threatened with bodily harm. These annoyances were the work of Bavard and a gang of worthless fellows who profited by the excitement of the period to wreak their personal spite under colour of patriotism. We need scarcely say that the insurgent chiefs not only disavowed but reprobated such rowdiness.

When Edgar Martin heard of the arrest of Mr. Varny, he immediately repaired to Nelson's quarters and demanded his release. It was granted at once. Martin could not be spared to perform this welcome service himself, but an orderly was despatched in his place.

Mr. Varny never knew or suspected to whom he was indebted for his speedy deliverance, but Rosalba always thought it was Edgar that had intervened.

Nelson's victory over Gore was an important one. Not a doubt of it. If Brown could do the same by Wetherall, the cause was gained. But there was uncertainty in this. Wetherall had come up very slowly from Chambly, owing to the destruction of bridges over the creeks on his route, but he was known to have a strong force and two heavy pieces of artillery. The works at St. Charles consisted of a quadrangle, fenced in with felled trees and covered with earth. The river lay in front, a wooded mound in the rear, and the garrison was further protected by Debartzch's

house and barn. The men were poorly armed, indeed, but some few had muskets, and there were two pieces of ordnance. The position ought to have been made a strong one—it was certainly stronger than that at St. Denis—but, somehow, Wetherall's first attack put him in possession of the wooded mound, which was the key of the position, and planting his canon there, he swept the insurgent camp. Later, he charged it with fixed bayonets and carried the day.

Nelson was hourly expecting the result of the battle, when who should arrive, among the rest, to announce the defeat, but Brown himself. Then all was hopelessly lost. Nelson dispersed his men and prepared to escape. A price was on his head, as on that of the principal leaders.

CHAPTER VIII.

"PER VARIOS CASUS."

EDGAR MARTIN was broken-hearted. Not one of the patriots who fought at St. Denis and St. Charles felt the blow of defeat more severely than he. It was not so much that his professional prospects were blighted, but that he had to fly from Rosalba. He remembered Mr. Varny's invitation, in case of disaster, but he could not avail himself of it. He was on the list of the proscribed, and his life was in danger if he remained in the country. He must fly. Nelson and the others had taken the route of the Townships, but he resolved to follow the course of the Richelieu, out into New York or Vermont. The advantage of this plan was that, as there were men of his race, most of them patriots, living all along that road, he could find shelter and hospitality from them as he advanced. Having shaved his beard and disguised himself as a journeyman, he boldly crossed the river at St. Antoine, and commenced his weary, dangerous pilgrimage into a long exile. He reached St. Marc in safety, as the troops were still all on the other side. He avoided Beloeil, where he was too well known, though he came in sight of its steeple, and remained overnight in the house of a friend. Thence, to keep away from the garrison of Chambly, whither Wetherall's column had already returned, he steered off into the interior and crept along the base of Boucherville mountain. Here he spent a whole night in the woods, with no other bed than a heap of dry leaves, and no other food than a biscuit and a fragment of cheese. Here too, his real danger began, for the whole of that plateau up to the frontier was overrun with volunteers and regular cavalry, who had strict orders to "gobble up" every suspicious character. He had almost formed the desperate resolution of going directly to Montreal, where he fancied he could be effectually concealed by his friends, for a time at least, but the whole southern bank was guarded and every boat that landed near the city was diligently searched. By stealthy stages and with infinite difficulty he reached Lacadie, and there spent several days hidden in a barn, being nursed of an ugly sore foot by the aged mother of a noted patriot. She warned him not to go near St. John's, which was full of bureaucrats and volunteers, but directed him, instead, to shape his course in a bee-line for Lacolle, giving him a pass-word and the names of several partisans who would be sure to take him in and further his safe progress to the neighbouring frontier.

Edgar had already been twelve days on the tramp, and spite of the good treatment which he had occasionally received—so much in contrast with the terrible sufferings of other fugitives—he was well nigh exhausted in both body and mind. The burden which he carried at his heart grew heavier every day. He could not get reconciled to the fearful disappointment of defeat in a cause in which he had staked everything, and the farther he removed from Rosalba, the more his spirits were depressed. There were moments of overwhelming despondency when he felt like going direct to the nearest military station and delivering himself up to his enemies.

Until now, he had effectually eluded all pursuit, not having even seen a red coat, but the presentiment seized him that he would stumble on a guard when he least expected it. What would come of such an encounter he hardly dared to think, for he had no arms about him, and was too much broken down to offer physical resistance.

Racked by such forebodings, he set out again, hiding by day and travelling by night. It was now nearly the middle of December, and the winter had fully arrived. The snow was piled high in the woods; it lay in huge drifts along the roads. Walking in such weather was doubly exhaustive. On the evening of the third day, as he emerged from his concealment to resume his march, he was encouraged by the thought that he had only twelve miles to reach the border line. If Providence favoured him for this last effort, the morning sun would see him safe in the land of liberty.

For the first hour he advanced without incident, having, as he thought, left Lacolle a good way behind him. But, on issuing from a little wood, what was his surprise and consternation to find himself within a few feet of a bivouac. A bright fire was burning before a small log-hovel, and in front of it sat a guard, with his musket carelessly thrown across his legs.